



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly – Government Administration and Elections
Committee

Testimony of Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor
February 22, 2013

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hawng, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee: thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 5900, An Act Requiring More Transparency in Education.

The issue that you raise is a priority for the State Department of Education. Our agency has prepared a proposal to address the governance of the State Education Resource Center (SERC), which was unanimously approved by the State Board of Education. We have asked the Education Committee to raise the attached proposal, and look forward to working with this committee and other legislators to take meaningful steps in the coming months.

I strongly support the intent of this legislation, and I believe that our proposal can and will ensure that transparency is a hallmark of the new SERC. Together we can advance structural and procedural reforms that will position SERC as an effective public authority – one that supports the education system in this state while providing for sufficient oversight and accountability.

SERC, established in 1969 as the Special Education Resource Center, provides a variety of services to the statewide education system, including districts and schools, in Connecticut. SERC is a valuable resource in ensuring Connecticut students receive a high-quality education.

The attached proposal does several things:

- Clarifies what SERC is – a body corporate and politic that serves as a public authority. This eliminates any ambiguity regarding SERC's basic structure.
- Creates a Board of Directors to govern SERC.
- Requires that the new SERC Board of Directors establish and hold itself accountable to specified hiring and procurement procedures.
- Requires that SERC submit an annual budget to the SBE. It also requires that SERC be audited annually in the same manner as local and regional boards of education.
- Clarifies that SERC employees are not state employees.
- Clarifies that SERC is subject to Freedom of Information Act.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit testimony. I share the commitment that this committee has demonstrated to promoting transparency and accountability at all levels of government, and I look forward to working with you to advance SERC legislation in this session.

CSDE SERC Governance Proposal

Section 10-4q of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

(a) The [State Board of Education shall establish a] State Education Resource Center shall [to] assist the [board] State Board of Education in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence. Such activities, to be provided by the State Education Resource Center or a regional educational service center, may include training and professional development seminars, publication of technical materials, research and evaluation, and other related activities. The center may support programs and activities concerning early childhood education, [the federal No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110] and closing the academic achievement gap between socio-economic subgroups, and other related programs.

(b) The Commissioner of Education, with the assistance of the State Education Resource Center, may provide grants to local and regional boards of education for districts identified as **low-achieving** [in need of improvement] under the provisions of section 10-223e. The grants shall be for the creation and acquisition of new curricula, training in the use of the curricula and related supporting textbooks and other materials. Local and regional boards of education may use such grants only for curricula, training and related textbooks and materials that have been authorized by the commissioner. Local and regional boards of education shall apply for grants pursuant to this subsection at such time and in such manner as the commissioner prescribes, and the commissioner shall determine the amount of the grant awards.

(c) Within available appropriations, [the Department of Education shall establish a] **there shall be a** Connecticut School Reform Resource Center within the State Education Resource Center established pursuant to subsection (a) of this section or by contract through a regional educational service center. The center shall operate year-round and focus on serving the needs of all public schools. The center shall (1) publish and distribute reports on the most effective practices for improving student achievement by successful schools, (2) provide a program of professional development activities for (A) school leaders, including curriculum coordinators, principals, superintendents and board of education members, and (B) teachers to educate [such] students that includes research-based child development and reading instruction tools and practices, (3) provide information on successful models for evaluating student performance and managing student data, (4) develop strategies for assisting such students who are in danger of failing, (5) develop culturally relevant methods for educating students whose primary language is not English, and (6) provide other programs and materials to assist in the improvement of public schools.

(d) (NEW) The operation and management of the State Education Resource Center shall be governed by a board of directors consisting of seven members, appointed as follows: (1) four members appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the General Assembly; (2) two members appointed by the State Board of Education; and (3) the Commissioner of Education or his designee. The Governor shall appoint the chairperson. The term of office of members of the board shall be four years or until a successor is appointed and qualified, whichever is longer. All members may be reappointed for subsequent terms. Vacancies shall be filled by the appointing authority for the expiration of the term of the member being replaced in the same manner as original appointments. Members shall receive no compensation for their services. The board of directors shall appoint an executive director who shall not be a member of the board and who shall serve at the pleasure of the board and receive such compensation as shall be fixed by the board. The executive director shall be the chief administrative officer of the State Education Resource Center and shall direct and supervise administrative affairs and technical activities in accordance with the directives of the board.

(e) (NEW) Four directors of the board shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of any business or the exercise of any power of the State Education Resource Center. For the transaction of any business or the exercise of any power of the State Education Resource Center, and except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the State Education Resource Center shall have power to act by a majority of the directors present at any meeting at which a quorum is in attendance.

(f) (NEW) The State Education Resource Center shall be a body corporate and politic. The board of the State Education Resource Center shall be a public educational authority acting on behalf of the state of Connecticut and shall have the power to sue and be sued, to receive and disburse private funds, to employ personnel, to enter into contracts, to purchase, receive, hold and convey real and personal property and otherwise to provide the programs, services and activities approved by the board of directors. The board of the State Education Resource Center shall have authority, within the limits prescribed by this part, to determine the programs and services to be provided, to employ staff under the executive director of the center, to prepare and expend the budget and, within the limits authorized under this section, to provide for the financing of the programs and projects of the State Education Resource Center. Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 4-98, 4-212 to 4-219, inclusive, 4a-51 and 4a-57, the State Education Resource Center shall further have the authority, within the limits prescribed by this part, to establish procedures which shall, at a minimum, address the following areas: (1) Adopting an annual budget and plan of operations, including a requirement for board approval before the budget or plan may take effect; (2) hiring, dismissing, promoting and compensating employees of the State Education Resource Center, including an affirmative action policy; (3) acquiring real and personal property and personal services, including a requirement of board approval for any nonbudgeted expenditure in excess of five thousand dollars; and (4) contracting for (A) financial, legal, consulting and other professional services, and (B) supplies, materials and equipment, including, notwithstanding any provision of this chapter, standards for determining when contracts described in this subdivision (4) shall be awarded on the basis of competitive bidding or competitive negotiation, with an exemption for small purchases and criteria for waiving competitive bidding or competitive negotiation.

(g) (NEW) The board of the State Education Resource Center shall submit a yearly budget and projected revenue statement to the State Board of Education. The accounts and financial records of the State Education Resource Center shall be audited annually in the same manner as the accounts of local or regional boards of education and copies provided to the State Board of Education.

(h) (NEW) Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 4-98, 4-212 to 4-219, inclusive, 4a-51 and 4a-57, the Department, in agreement with the board of the State Education Resource Center, may allocate funds to the State Education Resource Center to allow the State Education Resource Center to provide professional development services, technical assistance, evaluation activities, policy analysis, and other forms of assistance to local and regional boards of education, State Department of Education, charter schools, technical high schools, school readiness providers and other educational entities. The State Education Resource Center shall expend such funds in accordance with such agreement. For purposes of this section, other educational entities may include, but not be limited to, organizations or associations representing superintendents, boards of education and elementary and secondary schools.

(i) (NEW) Any director, officer, or employee of the State Education Resource Center, including, but not limited to, those retained on a project basis, shall not be deemed to be an employee of the state for purposes of the general statutes including, but not limited to, chapters 66 to 68, inclusive.

(j) (NEW) The State Education Resource Center shall be considered a public agency for the purposes of Chapter 14 of the Connecticut General Statutes.